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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001918

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGGERFO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: SETTLER HARASSMENT OF PALESTINIAN SCHOOLCHILDREN
SPARKS PUBLIC OUTRAGE

REF: JERUSALEM 01703

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This cable has been cleared by Embassy Tel Aviv.

¶1. SUMMARY. Settlers from Ma'on and Hill 833 outpost in the southern Hebron Hills have waged an ongoing campaign of harassment against Palestinian schoolchildren traveling from Um Tuba to their school in al-Tuwani, according to Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT). CPT believes that settlers attack Palestinians "to keep them away from their land." The GOI is investigating the incidents and has promised to find a safer route for the children to get to school. A group of prominent Israeli artists and politicians have petitioned PM Olmert to protect the children from the attacks. END SUMMARY

ONGOING HARASSMENT

¶2. (C) Rich Meyer of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) told Poloff that on April 29, 30-40 settlers surrounded an IDF jeep escorting Palestinian schoolchildren home to Um Tuba from their school in al-Tuwani and threw eggs and stones at it. A 45-minute standoff ensued. None of the settlers involved were arrested, according to Meyer. The following afternoon, April 30, a settler from Hill 833 again accosted the schoolchildren.

¶3. (C) Meyer reported that on the morning of May 2, one IDF jeep and one police jeep escorted the children to school along the road on the southern perimeter of Hill 833 and on their way discovered that settlers had set up a roadblock of stones. When CPT volunteers tried to take a picture of the roadblock, a settler wearing a black hood chased after and threw stones at them. Later on in the day, according to Meyer, somebody removed the roadblock.

¶4. (C) Meyer said the following afternoon, May 3, while they were escorted by Israeli Police on their return trip from school along the same road, the schoolchildren encountered another roadblock. (Note: Israeli Police and IDF alternate responsibility for escorting children home. End note.) According to Meyer, the police then asked the IDF to clear the blockades, but the IDF did not do so until May 10.

¶5. (C) The worst attack against the schoolchildren occurred on the afternoon May 6. According to Meyer, dozens of settlers ambushed the children and their IDF escort, throwing rocks and concrete stones at them. One settler even set a dog against them, thus prompting an IDF soldier to fire a warning shot in the air. Meyer told Poloff that, on May 10,

the IDF interviewed the Palestinian children about the attack.

WHY THE HARASSMENT?

¶6. (C) Meyer opined that harassment from settlers living in Ma'on and Hill 833 has been more frequent in the past two weeks. Settlers object to Palestinians using the aforementioned southern perimeter road and a shorter nearby road because they are too close to their orchards and lands, he said.

¶7. (C) A COGAT official told Emboff that the police have opened an investigation into the incidents. In the meantime, the official said, COGAT is committed to finding a safer route for the children to get to and from school.

PLANNED DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE ATTACKS

¶8. (C) Yariv Oppenheimer of Peace Now told Poloff that Peace Now will hold a protest rally near the Chavat Ma'on on May 12. He claimed that hundreds of people plan to protest, including Member of Knesset Ron Cohen (Meretz) and members of the Labor Party. He said that settler harassment against the schoolchildren has been an ongoing problem every weekend for the past month and that he would like the Israeli public to pressure the GOI to pursue dismantlement of outposts.

¶9. (U) Israeli media reported that more than 30 prominent Israeli artists and intellectuals signed a letter May 9 to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, urging him to order the IDF to defend Palestinian children in the southern Hebron Hills from

residents of Ma'on settler.
WALLES